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INDIA-PAKISTAN: Agreement To Pull Back Some Troops

on 4 Feb.
Indian and Pakistani negotiators agreed yesterday to pull back some troops from a key narrow section of their mutual border and to discuss further withdrawals, sector by sector.

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The agreement calls for most forces to withdraw within 15 days from a sensitive segment of the border in southern Kashmir to peacetime locations, according to press reports.

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Comment: The agreement should reduce tensions, but both sides are likely to maintain a high level of readiness until India's Brass Tacks exercise concludes this spring. Although the first step of the withdrawal will amount to a deescalation in a key border area, the chance of inadvertent clashes elsewhere will remain high so long as troops from both states occupy forward positions.

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Pakistani President Zia will portray the agreement as a statesmanlike gesture that breaks the stalemate. The ruling Muslim League will endorse it, but some Pakistani Army commanders probably will question privately whether it adequately addresses the Indian buildup in border areas not specifically designated. The Pakistani opposition will charge that the government has sold out to New Delhi, but Zia probably will be able to withstand such criticism so long as the agreement is not breached.

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The latest military moves probably reflect the momentum of the buildup. Commanders on both sides probably will continue to deploy forces until their respective Defense Ministries translate the agreement into operational orders—most likely in a few days. The drawdowns along the border are likely to be implemented slowly because commanders on both sides are reluctant to move so quickly as to give the other side any advantage.

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